

SOIL AND WATER

General Information

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Mission

To develop and carry out programs for the conservation, protection and development of soil, water and related plant and animal resources within Randolph County. The mission is accomplished by cooperating with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Services in working hand in hand with the American people to conserve natural resources on private lands.

Summary

Conservation assistance includes providing planning assistance, application assistance, practice-system maintenance and follow-up, administrative assistance, and communications and relations to employees, partners, stakeholders and private landowners in the community. There are 3 allocated positions for this department.

Overview

The Randolph Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was originally part of the multi-county Haw River Soil Conservation District, which was organized October 6, 1939 under provisions of the Soil Conservation District Law of North Carolina, Chapter 139, 1937. Organization was by petition and favorable referendum of the landowners in the District. Other counties in the Haw River Soil Conservation District were Guilford and Alamance.

SWCD was formed by separation from the Haw River District on February 24, 1961. The word “Water” was included in the name of the new district.

SWCD is a governmental subdivision of the State of North Carolina organized to exercise public powers conferred under provisions of the Soil and Water Conservation District Law of North Carolina, Chapter 139, as amended.

Randolph County SWCD currently has one full-time administrative employee, who serves as the department head, one full-time engineer position, and one full-time technician position. The administrative employee is responsible for the administrative aspects of the District. This employee also serves as the District’s education coordinator. The engineer position participates in the overall planning and execution of the conservation programs, administers the Cost Share Program, and is responsible for developing a Community Conservation Program for SWCD and Randolph County. The technician position assists the engineer with inspections on best management practices that are placed via the conservation programs.

The District is governed by a five-member Board of Supervisors made up of three elected members and two members appointed by the N.C. Soil and Water Conservation Commission. (The Commission consists of one member appointed by the governor and six elected by the N.C. Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.) Filing date for the elected members of the Board of Supervisors is at noon on the first Friday in July the year of election at the County

Board of Elections. The election is non-partisan and no primary election is held. Candidates for the office of Supervisors are voted on in November along with other public officials. Their terms of office are four years and are staggered so that three members (two elective and one appointive member) expire and the other two members (one elective member and one appointed member) expire two years later.

The appointive supervisors are appointed by the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission after the public election. Both appointive and elective members take office the first Monday in December. Both types of supervisors have the same powers and responsibilities under the District Law. Vacancies on the Board are filled for the unexpired term by appointment by the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. All members of the board must be residents of the District.

The Board organizes itself at the first meeting in the calendar year, usually January. Officers on the board are Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer. Supervisors receive no pay for their services; however, they do receive travel and subsistence from the State for performing their official duties.

All meetings of the Board of Supervisors are open to the public and monthly announcements of their meeting schedule are made following the reorganization. Presently the board is meeting the third Thursday of each month at 8:00 a.m. at the District Office, 2222 A South Fayetteville Street, Asheboro, North Carolina. Persons desiring to attend meetings may get information of the meeting plans and a copy of the agenda from the office.

In 1975 Randolph County became a part of the six-county North Central Piedmont Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Project Area, which was already functioning. A member of the District Board of Supervisors along with two other county citizens (one from the county planning board and one to represent the county commissioners) makes up the local RC&D Steering Committee. The purpose of the RC&D program is to encourage and improve the capability of volunteer local elected and civic leaders to plan and carry out projects for resource conservation and community development. RC&D is now known as the Piedmont Conservation Council.

It is practically impossible to operate a Soil and Water Conservation District without funds. Although the Randolph District has been organized since 1961, no local funds from the County treasury were appropriated until 1971. A part-time secretary was then hired with CETA funds to assist the Board of Supervisors with their administrative duties and to coordinate district activities. The CETA secretary was phased out with the reduction of the CETA program. The district was then funded by the County to pay a full-time person to administer the district program and provide technical assistance.

Beginning in 1979 the NC State Legislature made available to the district funds up to \$2,000, provided the County would match this amount.

In 1990 the County Commissioners assumed responsibility for the district and made SWCD a County department. They allocated two full-time employee positions (one technical and one administrative) to the district.

In 1992, the State of North Carolina adopted an amendment to the Water Quality

Discharge Rules. This amendment (known as the .0200 rule) was for waste disposal not discharged to surface waters, which applies to animals (cattle, swine, sheep, poultry, and horses) that are confined at least 45 days per year. These operations are policed by the N.C. Division of Water Quality and operate under the guidance of a certified animal waste management plan and state general permit. The waste management plan must be certified by a “technical specialist” approved by the N.C. Soil and Water Conservation Commission. In 1997, during the .0200 workload, the District Board of Supervisors decided to ask the County Commissioners for an engineering position because there was no one on staff who could help producers develop .0200 waste management plans. This position was approved and an engineer was brought to the district for 3 1/2 years.

By 2000, the .0200 workload was finished, and the District Board of Supervisors decided to ask the County Commissioners for two technical positions to replace the engineer. One technician position and one environmental specialist position were allocated to the district. As part of the 2002 budget cuts, the technician position was eliminated. The environmental specialist resigned at the end of 2003. With this position now vacant, the Board reassessed the needs of the department. The N.C. Agriculture Cost Share Program and the Community Conservation Program (both described under “Operations”) require the services of an engineer. Therefore, the Board once again asked the County to change the environmental specialist position back to an engineer position. The County approved this change in February 2004. In July 2004 the county hired a Soil and Water Engineer to over see the NC Ag Cost Share Program as well as develop a community conservation program. The N.C. Department of Natural Resources will reimburse the County a total of approximately \$20,000 annually for technical positions.

Randolph County’s SWCD operates through an operational agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); the State of North Carolina, Division of Soil and Water Conservation; and Randolph County. Although each of these parties is independent, they each recognize the need to coordinate as a federal, state, and local partnership for the successful delivery of conservation programs related to our soil, water, air, plant, animal, and human resources. These agencies conduct a common effort to inform the public of program opportunities and benefits through newspapers, schools, civic groups, television, radio, and Internet.

Currently the Soil and Water Office is provided office space through the County. In the past the office housed one NRCS employee who currently has an office in Asheboro in the USDA Service Center. The district has one vehicle – Ford Escape Hybrid. NRCS and SWCD work together to provide staffing and resources commensurate with workload, priorities, allocated funding, and expertise necessary to deliver a balanced and diversified conservation program. Staffing will be a mix of employees provided by federal, state, county, and district resources.

Operations

The public is encouraged to use the assistance provided on request through the Randolph County SWCD. Assistance is generally provided without charge.

1. Consultative assistance is provided where advice and council is needed in dealing with soil and water issues. This service is available to contractors, public officials, clubs, private individuals, agencies and others needing technical guidance in solving soil and water conservation issues.

2. Technical assistance is provided to landowners who need more detailed help in solving resource problems. Examples of technical assistance include design and on-site layout of needed conservation measures, soil survey interpretations, determining whether and where land is appropriate for a fishing pond, help in solving a drainage problem, and conservation plans made for this land. Planning assistance is given in agricultural land use and for wildlife, recreation, woodland, and urban uses of land. Information on agronomy, biology, forestry, soils and engineering is available.

3. Technical assistance is provided to county and municipal governments, area planning and development commissions, authorities, zoning boards, tax assessors, institutional boards, health departments and the like. Assistance to these organizations normally includes soil interpretations and inventory data on agricultural and non-agricultural land, recreation, water, wildlife and woodland resources.

4. Information and education assistance can be given to schools, service clubs, youth groups, and others interested in conservation. It is requested that the District be given appropriate recognition in the publications of the organizations for help provided.

In implementing the District program, the Supervisors will utilize the resources of such cooperating agencies as the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Cooperative Extension Service, Forestry Service, Division of Soil and Water Conservation, Wildlife Resources Commission, and other agencies of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. In addition to the above, some other groups and agencies that have an interest in the District activities include city and county government, schools, churches, businesses and industries.

North Carolina Agriculture Cost Share Program

In 1989, Randolph County was included in the State Agriculture Cost Share Program. The N.C. Soil and Water Commission allocates a set amount of funds annually for this program, which deals with water quality issues, and approves best management practices. The N.C. Division of Soil and Water Conservation in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) provide administrative assistance. Eligibility for the program is determined by the Randolph SWCD Board of Supervisors and by the criteria that they set. The program is open for all land users to apply. The Board of Supervisors has set a 65% maximum cost-share rate (landowner pays 35%) for all approved applications for each practice installed. Cost-Share incentive payments are also available to encourage the use of several practices.

Some of the Best Management Practices include the following: animal waste management systems, conservation tillage, critical area plantings, cropland conversion to permanent vegetation, diversions, fertilizer management, field borders, filter strips, grade control structures, grassed waterways, incinerators, sediment control structures, sod-based rotations, stock trails, stream crossings, strip-cropping, terraces, and water control structures.

The Cost Share Program is advertised in local newspapers and in various agency newsletters. Since there is a set budget for this program, the Board of Supervisors reviews applications and ranks them in order of priority. They may not be able to fund every application. After an application is approved, the Soil and Water engineer (or a NRCS employee, if the engineer is not available, or in the absence of any technical S&W employee) visits the site and determines the needs. He then develops an agreement (contract) with the landowner that delineates the scope of work to be done, estimated cost of the project, and estimated time frame

for completion. The agreement goes to DENR for approval. When the project is completed, Soil and Water requests payment from DENR (65% reimbursement based on the original estimated cost) to the landowner. If there are cost overruns in projects and if there are funds remaining in the budget after all approved applications have been funded, the landowner can request supplemental payments up to 65% of the actual cost. These payments have to be approved by the Board of Supervisors and by DENR.

North Carolina Community Conservation Program

As Randolph County continues to grow, our SWCD must also evolve to keep pace with these changes. Developers are replacing farmers, and real estate is fast becoming the hottest commodity. As this trend continues, we must establish a method in which the county's natural resources can be closely monitored. We need to expand our mission beyond the realm of agriculture. Therefore, the Supervisors of the Soil and Water District have agreed to reorganize the Soil and Water office to accommodate a Community Conservation Program. Randolph County will be one of the first soil and water districts in the state to initiate this program. The Supervisors have met with Lynn Sprague, a representative from DENR, who is assisting them with the planning process.

In coordinating the Community Conservation Program, the engineer will utilize technical, financial and educational resources from traditional and nontraditional sources and focus on local landowners/users, even municipalities, for the conservation of soil, water and related resources. He will create an inventory of governmental agencies and private organizations that offer technical and financial assistance to landowners. He will develop a list of services and programs offered to landowners through these agencies and organizations. Upon completion of the inventory, he will prioritize all concerns and recommend a plan of action to resolve such concerns. He will seek to secure funding for projects as well as future salary through public and private grants and will develop policies and procedures to proactively educate and assist the landowners of Randolph County.

The Community Conservation Program will provide citizens a centralized service location. Citizens will fill out a standardized general information form that will be reviewed by the engineer. The engineer will then visit the property and clarify exactly what needs to be done to solve the customer's request. While the engineer is on site, he can also review other aspects of the property and offer suggestions. Upon completion of the review, the engineer will prepare a written proposal to address the issues present on that property. He will then oversee the project implementation and monitor program success.

Quilt Trail

The Randolph County Quilt Trail began in 2010 as a project of the Piedmont Conservation Council, with grant funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Randolph County Soil and Water Conservation District received and approved applications, and members of the Randolph County Quilters Guild volunteered their time to paint and hang the quilt squares. This Trail showcases the heritage of farm families in rural Randolph County. Once the monies from the grant were encumbered, the local Soil and Water Board decided to continue the Quilt Trail application process. Although funding has been dispersed, the board continues to accept and approve Quilt Trail applications. For a fee the Randolph SWCD will have the square made and painted for those that are approved.

Education

The conservation program administered by the Randolph County SWCD Board of Supervisors is totally voluntary. The Board does not have the authority to force any producer or anyone else to practice conservation. Education is our most important tool and basic means of accomplishing our goals. Whether it is a pre-school child up to an elder of the community, no person young or old should go uninformed about the need for the wise use of our natural resources. The very basis of the early district concept was to get local people involved in the conservation movement through demonstrations and educational efforts. And even today while technical assistance is our major thrust, information and education is certainly our next highest priority.

Over the past sixteen years the district has made a conscious effort to expand its education activities.

- Sammy Soil Saver puppet shows are offered in the spring to kindergarten, first grade and second grade students throughout the county.
- A poster contest, based on a different theme each year, is offered each fall to all third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade students.
- An essay contest is offered for sixth grade students.
- A public speaking contest is offered to seventh and eighth grade students.
- An Envirothon competition is offered for middle school and high school students. Materials are provided to the schools in the fall, and teams of students study these materials all year. In the spring, teams are tested in five areas: soil, water, forestry, wildlife, and current environmental issues. Several teams have gone on to compete in the Area and State Envirothon competitions held each spring.
- Enviroscope programs are administered for schools and civic groups. These programs use display items to demonstrate effects of runoff, etc.
- Field days for elementary school students are conducted yearly in partnership with other local agencies in Randolph County.
- There are numerous publications, booklets and pamphlets available from all agencies that assist the district to enlighten any inquiring mind on the subject of conservation.
- Newspaper articles and public meetings have been utilized to explain the activities of the district. Conservation programs can be arranged with sufficient notice.

It is our goal to let more people know what the district is and does in hopes they will join with us in conserving today for an abundant tomorrow. A visit or telephone call to the district may provide any citizen with the answer for something he has wanted to know.

Partnership with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The SWCD, through an operational agreement, works hand in hand with NRCS to administer certain USDA programs. Federal funds have been available for establishing conservation practices. Below is a list of services provided within each program from USDA:

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** is a voluntary USDA conservation program for farmers and ranchers who face serious threats to soil, water, and related natural resources. It provides technical, financial, and educational assistance primarily in designated priority areas. EQIP offers 5- to 10-year contracts that provide up to 75% cost-share for conservation practices and incentive payments may be offered at a per-acre rate, for 1 to 3 years, for certain land management practices.

- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** is a voluntary program for agricultural landowners. Through CRP, landowners can receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource-conserving covers on eligible farmland. CRP offers 10- to 15-year contracts that provide up to 50% of the participant's cost in establishing approved conservation practices.
- **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** is a voluntary program that encourages creation of high quality wildlife habitats that support wildlife populations. Through WHIP, landowners can receive technical assistance and cost-share assistance to land managers who agree to restore, develop, and manage wildlife habitats. WHIP provides up to \$10,000 of cost sharing for establishing, improving, and managing habitat for wildlife according to a 5- to 10-year Wildlife Habitat Development Agreement with NRCS.
- **Forestry Incentives Program (FIP)** was originally authorized in 1978 to share up to 65% of the costs of tree planting, timber stand improvements, and related practices on non-industrial forest lands. FIP's forest maintenance and reforestation provide numerous resource benefits, including reduced wind and soil erosion and enhanced water quality and wildlife habitats as well as helping to assure a reliable future supply of timber. The demands on our natural resources are becoming more of a burden every day. Because Randolph County is fast growing, more local investments must be made to correct local burdens. Conservation practices are necessities, not luxuries, and affect everyone.

Assistance from others

The District gratefully acknowledges the assistance received from other agencies, businesses and individuals who make it possible to carry out District programs. We particularly recognize the following:

- **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** - the technical hand of the district. They make available professional personnel trained in the science of resource management and development.
- **Farm Service Agency (FSA)** – administers farm commodity and conservation programs and makes loans to farmers and ranchers who are unable to obtain conventional credit.
- **Rural Development** (replaced the Farmers Home Administration) - is the lending arm of the US Department of Agriculture for small housing and community development projects.
- **North Carolina Forest Service** - cooperates with NRCS and SWCD personnel in planning for woodland management, insect and disease control, etc.
- **North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service** - makes available research data from North Carolina State University and offers informational services on crops, gardening, lawn care, homemaking, nutrition, etc.
- **Division of Soil and Water Conservation, Department of Environment and Natural Resources** - provides administrative information, coordinates plans and information from

all 96 conservation districts in North Carolina, and administers the North Carolina Agriculture Cost Share Program.

- **North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission** - promotes conservation and wise use of the state's abundant wildlife resources.

Cooperation is received from other branches of state government, and the District works closely with many local agencies, including county commissioners, planning board, health department, boards of education, and many businesses and individuals.

The Board of Supervisors of the Randolph Soil and Water Conservation District recognizes that without the cooperation received from all those interested in conserving our natural resources, no part of this program can be completed.

Performance Measurements

The SWCD measures are tracked by the Engineer and Technician for technical and by the Soil and Water Administrator for educational. The goals and results that are tracked are listed below.

Agricultural Programs:

Goal: to provide technical assistance to those requesting assistance on Ag related items

Number of Requests for Technical Assistance - Ag Lands

Percent of Goal Achieved

Number of Applications Received for Ag Related Assistance

Percent of Goal Achieved

Number of Agricultural Contracts Written

Percent of Goal Achieved

Goal: To provide planning assistance in the development of conservation Plans.

Number of Cropland acres planned for

Percent of Goal Achieved

Number of Hayland acres planned for

Percent of Goal Achieved

Number of Patureland acres planned for

Percent of Goal Achieved

Goal: To provide planning assistance with nutrient/waste management

Number of acres planned Nutrient Management Planned on.
Percent of goal
achieved

Number of nitrogen pounds managed
Percent of goal
achieved

Number of Phosphorus pounds managed
Percent of goal
achieved

Goal: To reduce soil loss

Number of tons of soil loss reduced
Percent of goal
achieved

Number of grants applied for for ag-land
Number of grants received

Goal: To increase water capacity on farms

Number of gallons of water increased
Percent of goal
achieved

Communications and Relations:

Goal: To develop and present conservation information for employees, partners, clients, and stakeholders

Number of clients provided conservation information
Percent of clients provided conservation information within one work week

Number of clients provided technical information on
on-site inventory and evaluations (I&E's)

Percent of clients provided technical information on on-site inventory and evaluations
(I&E's) within one work week

Community Programs:

Goal: To develop and implement a Community Conservation Program for Randolph County on non-ag lands.

Number of clients requesting technical assistance on non-ag lands

Percent of goal

Number of applications received for Community Conservation Assistance

Percent of goal

Number of square feet of watershed being treated by a Best Management Practice (BMP)

Percent of goal
achieved

Number of clients reached through outreach on no-ag lands

Percent of goal
achieved

Number of contracts written on non-ag land

Percent of goal
achieved

Number of community conservation grants applied for

Number of community conservation grants received